

## International agricultural experiences can shape the culture and impact of agriculture's "Next-Gen" professionals

Emma Knowles

School of Agriculture, Food and Wine, University of Adelaide, SA 5000 Australia  
Email: emma@knowles.org.au

**Abstract.** Facilitating opportunities for undergraduate students to be immersed in remote, developing communities helps develop a better understanding of the differences between Australian and international agricultural systems. Traveling to central Sulawesi in Indonesia with the aid of the New Colombo Plan Scholarship in 2023 provided an opportunity to study local agricultural and forestry conservation practices. This facilitated an understanding of the importance of appropriate allocation of agricultural resources, environmental conservation, the impact of natural disasters and their effect on agricultural trade and economics, and how social, political, and cultural views can alter consumer perspectives. It also highlighted the differences in social capital between our countries and how this impacts the ability of producers to adopt innovation. With an ever-growing population, it is crucial that the next generation of agriculturists utilise these opportunities to develop our understanding of how global agricultural production coalesces, and the opportunities and challenges that producers face.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, capacity building, agriculture students, international development

### Introduction

With the Australian agricultural sector continually developing and on target to become a \$100 billion industry by 2030, it is particularly important for upcoming agriculturalists to gain an acute awareness of Australia's global trading partners to build and strengthen economic ties. Utilising opportunities to study internationally and experience global agriculture allows university students to gain a better understanding of Australia's role within the broader agricultural industry. These experiences allow students to establish international relationships, develop their cultural awareness, and a greater appreciation for Australia's position in the agricultural industry.

### The opportunity for an international experience

The Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies (ACICIS) facilitated seven university intensive programs in the summer of 2023; one of which was the Agricultural Professional Practicum (APP). ACICIS is a non-profit international educational consortium that provides in-country Indonesian study programs for Australian tertiary students and is the primary mechanism through which students pursue study in Indonesia for academic credit (ACICIS 2023). ACICIS runs study programs in a range of disciplines including Indonesian language, journalism, development, business, law, creative arts, agriculture, sustainable tourism, and international relations. Participating students may be eligible to receive funding through the New Colombo Plan. This is an Australian government initiative that supports Australian undergraduate students to study and undertake internships in the Indo-Pacific region.

The six-week APP intensive program saw participating students being immersed in Indonesian agriculture, having the opportunity to meet with delegates and experts from various fields, and partake in an internship with a company to gain practical experience. The structure of the program consisted of a two-week academic period at the Atma Jaya University in Jakarta followed by a four-week internship period with an Indonesian organisation. ACICIS (2023, p. 3) describes the APP program as follows:

The APP consists of intensive Indonesian language study at an Indonesian partner university, English language lectures by local practitioners and experts in the fields of agriculture, food science, environment and resource management, and a supervised practicum placement with a local or international agricultural, agribusiness, or resource management organisation operating in Indonesia. This program runs in the Australian summer university break, from early January to mid-February for a six-week intensive period. The program is designed to cater for students with no existing Indonesian language skills. Candidates with existing language skills will, however, be welcome. All placements provide an English-language working environment.

### Academic component

The academic period provided valuable opportunities for students to engage with knowledgeable Indonesian experts and delve into discussions on agriculture in Southeast Asia. The topics covered included climatic disparities, biosecurity measures, technology adoption, and economic aspects. These discussions enabled students to enhance their knowledge in their respective areas of interest. As a result, students developed a deeper appreciation for certain facets of Australian agriculture that they had previously taken for granted, such as the larger land holdings of primary producers; they also identified areas where Australia could make improvements. Furthermore,

the discussions explored various methods to support the development of agriculture in Southeast Asia, including addressing the issue of food spoilage during transit from producers to consumers in Indonesia. This academic period not only fostered discussions and self-reflection among students but also facilitated networking opportunities with Indonesian representatives and young Australian professionals.

### ***Company internship***

To gain firsthand experience in international agriculture, each APP student completed a month-long internship with an Indonesian company. These companies spanned various sectors, including forestry, livestock, reef management, and communications; carefully chosen to enable students to deepen their understanding of cultural differences between Australia and Indonesia within their specific areas of interest. During their internships, students honed their communication and language skills, navigated cultural barriers, and documented their reflections on their experiences. With workplace visits ranging from live export docks to local farming villages, these personal experiences offered students profound insights into overseas production systems, widely recognized as an exceptional learning opportunity.

### **Plate 1. Students replanting mangroves to understand the importance of clean waterways for both community and agricultural purposes**



Source: Author personal file.

### ***A personal experience***

APP participant and New Colombo Plan scholar Emma Knowles completed her internship with the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP). NTFP-EP is a multinational partnership involving numerous non-governmental organizations that work with forest-based communities to strengthen their capacity for the sustainable management of natural resources. During the internship period, her task was to translate a book from Indonesian into English that focused on the utilization of non-timber forest products in the small village of Namo, located in central Sulawesi. Upon the completion of this task, she travelled to the remote village of Namo, enabling her to gain a firsthand understanding of how the community collects, utilizes, and rehabilitates products from the forests, while living within the local community.

This experience proved to be truly eye-opening, as it allowed her to meet the key individuals mentioned in the translated book, sample the local food and beverages made from the harvested produce, and gain insight into the devastating impact of natural disasters such as landslides and tsunamis on village communities. Experiences like these would not have been possible without the support of international study opportunities, nor would the opportunity to develop language skills and forge valuable networks have arisen.

### **Key learnings**

The knowledge learned from international experiences like the APP are instrumental in shaping the future of Australia's agricultural students. These immersive opportunities not only equip students with a deeper understanding of Australia's place in the global agricultural landscape but also foster critical awareness of our role as economic partners on the world stage. For upcoming agriculturalists, these experiences serve as invaluable stepping stones towards becoming well-rounded and globally aware professionals who can contribute effectively to the sustainable growth and innovation of Australia's agricultural sector.

#### **Plate 2. APP participant Emma Knowles learning traditional and currently implemented methods of planting rice with local farmers**



Source: Author personal file.

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### **Reference List**

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